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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 001136

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: MOROCCO AND EID AL ADHA: CAN'T AFFORD TO BE POOR  
ANYMORE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

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Summary:  
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¶1. (SBU) Working class and poor Moroccans are expressing an almost existential angst about the political and economic state of the country resulting from worry over the price of sheep for this year's Eid Al Adha (feast of the sacrifice). One man said that Morocco was a country in which people "could not afford to be poor anymore." Many interlocutors said that this Eid season has left them unsure of their place in an evolving Morocco, and feeling powerless before the larger political and economic forces affecting their lives. End Summary.

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Angst Over Ungulates  
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¶2. (SBU) In a public hammam (bath) in the working class Ennahda neighborhood of Rabat on December 7, where Moroccans without running water take their families to wash and enjoy social time with neighbors, bathers expressed an almost existential angst about the political and economic state of the country resulting from worry over the price of sheep for this year's Eid Al Adha (feast of the sacrifice), which begins on December 9. One man complained to Pol Off that a small sheep cost 1,300 dirhams (USD 151) (which he said was a significant increase over last year's prices), while average-to-large animals were running between 2,500 (USD 290) and 3,000 dirhams (USD 348). Both press reports and people on the street have attributed the problem to the overall rise in the current price of feed and forage and, conversely, to the fact that heavy rains presage a rich pasture season, causing farmers to hold back stock in anticipation of fattening animals cheaply in the coming spring for next season.

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Can't Afford to be Poor  
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¶3. (SBU) A father at the hammam lamented that he could hardly support his family, but could not bear the thought of disappointing his children by not buying a sheep. While scrubbing his young son in the crowded, hot and noisy chamber, he said that Morocco was a country in which people "could not afford to be poor anymore." His statement met with a chorus of approval from others in the room. One block away from the hammam, a large, undeveloped lot played host to a teeming impromptu sheep market filled with trucks and animals from the countryside, and customers from the city.

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Small Increase, Large Impact

14. (SBU) The sheep phenomenon captured the airwaves and newspapers in the run-up to the holiday, prompting the Government to publish a statement indicating that the price of mutton only rose by 4 dirhams (USD .46) a kilo over last year. However, this relatively small increase seems to have had a disproportionately large impact on the psyche of certain segments of the population feeling battered by broader up-ticks in food staple prices, and fighting a sense of fear over the repercussions of the global economic crisis. Whether accurate or not, several interlocutors living at, or just above, the poverty line, including a widowed housekeeper with two children, separately expressed a similar and deep sense of worry brought to the fore by concerns over abilities to afford Eid sheep.

Lamb Loans

15. (SBU) In an interesting development, banks are advertising Akrad Akbash (Lamb Loans) to help ease the pressures on families. Anecdotal and press reports seem to indicate a recent decrease in sales, as some families possibly hope for a price drop the night before the feast.

Comment:

16. (SBU) Sheep at Eid play a cultural role similar to

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Thanksgiving turkeys in the United States. The cost of a large sheep in 2008 is more than the monthly salary of a great many Moroccans. Regardless of the reason for the price increase, many interlocutors have said that this Eid season has left them unsure of their place in an evolving Morocco, and feeling powerless before the larger political and economic forces affecting their lives. End Comment.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>  
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Riley